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Webster Quitting CIA Post

Ex-St. Louisan Was
 'Superb,' Bush Says

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WASHINGTON — William H. Webster is retiring as head of the Central Intelligence Agency, President George Bush announced Wednesday. Webster, a former FBI director, grew up in Webster Groves, Mo., and was a federal prosecutor and judge in St. Louis.

"I hate to see him go," Bush said at an early morning news conference at the White House. Webster, 67, stood at his side.

"Bill has brought an integrity, an effectiveness and an insight to the many intelligence-gathering operations of this nation. He has done a superb job," Bush said.

"I'm leaving you a healthy organization," Webster told the president. "You hate to leave, but something tells you that it's a good time to leave."

For several months, Webster had been under pressure to resign as the nation's top intelligence official. His critics included some senior members of the White House staff and State Department officials.

Webster was criticized by some for the quality of information given Bush and his policy advisers before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait Aug. 2. But some people involved in intelligence accused the critics of trying to make Webster a scapegoat. They said that



President George Bush shaking hands with CIA Director William H. Webster after announcing Webster's retirement.

the CIA had offered sound intelligence assessments but that senior policymakers had ignored them.

Webster made clear during the early months after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait that he thought economic sanctions would be effective in forcing Saddam Hussein's army out.

But in January, shortly before the United Nations deadline for an Iraqi withdrawal, Webster said that sanctions alone would not work. Democrats immediately criticized him for reversing his analysis to support Bush's policy.

Despite that criticism, Webster's overall relations with Congress were good. He had a reputation for honesty and candor when dealing with members of Congress.

On Wednesday, Bush defended the U.S. intelligence effort before the Persian Gulf War. "The intelligence was outstanding, and the [intelligence] community performed fantastically," Bush said. "I have no complaints whatsoever about the quality of our

intelligence."

Webster, who took over as director of central intelligence in 1987 in President Ronald Reagan's administration, was said to have been dissatisfied with his role in Bush's administration. He rarely participated in White House discussions before and during the war.

But on this point, Bush said it had been his decision that the CIA "have the single mission of providing intelligence to the policymakers of this government." Bush said Webster "performed admirably" in gathering intelligence and "not trying to shape policy."

As director of the CIA, Webster succeeded William J. Casey, who was a member of Reagan's Cabinet. Webster did not have Cabinet status under Bush.

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Webster, who was in private law practice and served as U.S. attorney in St. Louis before being appointed a federal judge in St. Louis, said he retained "roots in the law, and this gives me an opportunity to pursue other avenues in the private sector."

He did not say any more about his plans. Webster is expected to stay at the CIA until the Senate confirms his successor. That could happen quickly, but a controversial nominee might not

get into the job for months.

There has been widespread speculation that Webster would welcome an appointment to the Supreme Court. The nine-member court is sitting at full strength.

Bush said he did not have a successor to Webster in mind. Among those frequently mentioned is Robert Gates, Bush's deputy national security adviser and a longtime CIA operations official. Bush described Gates on Wednesday as a "worthy man."

Also often mentioned for the CIA directorship is James Lilley, who on Friday will end his tour as U.S. ambassador to China. Lilley was a CIA official specializing in Chinese issues when Bush served in China in the 1970s as U.S. representative. Bush and Lilley worked closely together and became friends.

Others whose names surface as potential CIA directors include Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, and former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, R-Minn.

Announcing Webster's retirement, Bush noted that Webster had served 26 years in government, including 8 years as FBI director. Webster will mark his fourth anniversary as CIA director on May 25.